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LETTERS

British intelligence

SIR—I am writing in the hope that I will be permitted to reply to the insulting remarks by Professor M. R. D. Foot published in your issue of March 15th. I write as a member of what he calls "a large, loose category: unconscious fellow-travellers, people who do an enemy's work for him without realising it. They are found in all sorts of walks of life, perhaps clustering the thickest among trade union organisers, journalists and teachers".

I am a teacher. I have been working in West Germany for 10 years. My work involves teaching at a gymnasium—a lot of it to senior pupils—and I give lessons at the local *Volkshochschule* in the evenings. I would like to ask Professor Foot and his fellow-travellers what he would say when, for example, he is asked:

"Why are there so many strikes in Britain?"

"Why are there so many ex-public school people in top jobs?"

"Why has my BL car taken so long to arrive?"

"Why weren't British expatriates given a vote in the European election?"

Why . . . why . . . why . . . ? This list could go on for pages. I am continually being asked for explanations for apparently inexplicable behaviour by interested, intelligent—and usually sympathetic—people. Am I—and many thousands like me—supposed to make myself look stupid by trying to pretend that everything in the garden is lovely?

It's about time the British establishment woke up to one basic fact of modern life: excellence speaks for itself. To try to bury one's head in the sand and to defend one's position by insinuations about those who have the temerity to be able to think for themselves and, worse, the honesty to express their thoughts, strikes me as little less than despicable. I need hardly add that such tactics are hardly likely to encourage any feelings of loyalty.

Professor Foot goes on to say that many do not see beyond the end of their political noses. Why should anyone want to do anything other than that? I suspect that Professor Foot admires the public school ethos of "playing the game", "not letting the side down" and so on. Who cares about games and sides? Most normal people just want the best (be it Japanese cars or French apples) for themselves and their families and feel that sides are irrelevant in an age when our destinies are apparently in the hands of a bunch of inept politicians and

religious nut cases.

One last point. Precisely because those whom Mr Foot brands as "fellow-travellers" can think for themselves, they are not likely to be actively working for "the enemy". Intelligent people have got better things to do. I, for one, prefer to leave cloak and dagger games to those overgrown schoolboys who appear to enjoy them.

Essen,

West Germany · HELEN PENELOPE LITTLE

SIR—The suggestion made by Professor M. R. D. Foot in his otherwise thoughtful essay on the intelligence services (March 15th) that investigative enquiries into the security forces are "orchestrated" by some unknown but, by implication, hostile force to the society of the west, surely needs some qualification. "Press outcry" must form part of the process of accountability that Professor Foot indicates is desirable. However, to assume that accountability is only a valid function when carried out by representative bodies is far too narrow a definition. To eliminate or at least deny the validity of journalistic investigation is to exclude one of the most valuable assets of our society—the society that the intelligence services of the west are "fighting" to defend. Had it not been for the press the abuse of secrecy found in Watergate would not have been exposed.

Certainly it is possible to suggest that the press are the "shrillies" or the "unconscious travellers" indirectly weakening the west's capacity to defend itself from those attempting to sap its power, by their activities. But equally the press does seek to expose the abuses that emerge within the government and administration, and in so doing reveals faults which if allowed to continue make a mockery of the values we in the west should uphold.

Surely the most important of those values is the elimination of the abuse of power. The security forces from MI5 to the metropolitan police are not by their nature going to disclose their activities. But can we assume that these organisations are self-correcting? If we do and exclude journalistic examination we are in danger of creating a state within a state.

Consequently, rather than seeking to undermine the British police I would argue that much of what is written currently about the police is directed towards revealing possible areas of abuse, perhaps most notably in the area of those held in police custody. Power can corrupt and it cannot be correct to dismiss as effectively irrelevant an area of our society, in the press, which seeks to reduce the abuse of the possession of power.

Oxford

ROGER RAMSDEN